

MEMORANDUM

Office of the Chief Administrator

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: May 8, 2023

From: Lisa Spitale
Chief Administrative Officer
File:

Item #: 2023-254

Subject: Anvil Centre Operations

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council accept this memo as information regarding the operations of Anvil Centre.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide City Council with Anvil Centre Operations information related to questions regarding Anvil Centre.

OVERVIEW

Anvil Centre has been in operations for 8.5 years, opening in September 2014. The impact of the Pandemic was significant and all departments within Anvil Centre continue to work towards full recovery in 2023.

Anvil Centre services range from arts & culture programs, activities and exhibitions to conferences and event management. In recognition of the rich array of services provided at Anvil Centre and the 100,000+ annual guests, in late 2019, our goals were consolidated to reflect the services provided and aligned with the City's approved Arts Strategy and Theatre Strategy.

1. To provide a vibrant gathering place for residents and visitors that will inspire community spirit and pride, cultivate commerce; promote tourism, and foster learning in arts, culture and heritage.
2. To create a cultural hub that is home to festivals, exhibitions, shows performances and celebrations.

3. To generate positive economic and social impacts for the community by bringing people to the City of New Westminster when hosting events and performances.
4. To expand business hours of operations to allow for additional services, programs and revenue generation which will provide additional community access at Anvil Centre.

Questions and Answers

Anvil Centre Signage and Website (online presence)

Ensuring that the community is aware of activities at Anvil Centre is a priority for all staff.

In 2017 & 2018, Staff worked with a sign consultant, CNW bylaw staff, engineering, electrical, building permits and communications staff to ensure that the exterior and interior signage was visible, easy to read and provided information regarding all activities at Anvil Centre. Due to infrastructure limitations, original signage concepts could not be implemented.

The original concept was to have 'Intelligent City' digital signage on the street lamp posts in front of the venue on Columbia Street. Not only could the signs provide information on Anvil Centre activities such as performances, programs, events and exhibitions and attractions, but could also be used during emergencies, to provide directions and information to the community.

The second option reviewed was a marquis style sign on the sidewalk in front of Anvil Centre.

Both sign options provided high visibility, ease of use and technical attributes required to provide clear messaging to people on the street. Due to infrastructure limitations (electrical requirements), neither of the first 2 sign choices were deemed feasible at this time. Therefore staff developed the current Columbia Street facing digital signage which falls within the building codes, by-laws and the capacity of infrastructure that is currently in place in the City of New Westminster.

As infrastructure is upgraded and sign technology advances, Anvil staff will continue to work with the appropriate departments and experts regarding higher visibility signage.

Anvil Centre has a comprehensive website which features an inclusive event and activities calendar on the homepage www.anvilcentre.com . Programs, exhibitions, performances, conference events and other activities are displayed on the homepage calendar with full event / program details.

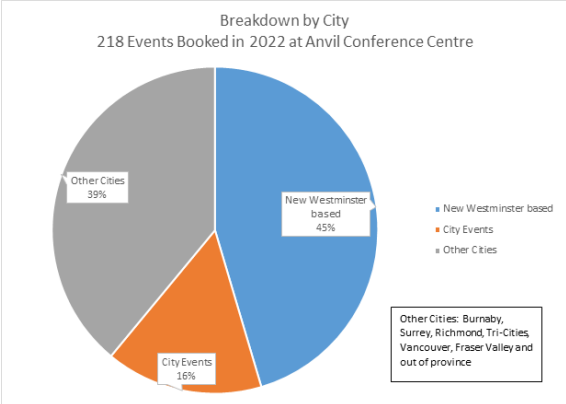
Please note that the majority of Conference Services events are private events and are not advertised to the public. The contracted dates are identified on the website calendar as booked with the event identified on the calendar as 'private' event / meeting. Due to

confidentiality of many events, the client identifies if they want their event listed for the public to see.

Conference Services Contributing to Tourism in the City of New Westminster

Conference Services brings 55,000+ delegates annually to Anvil Centre and the City of New Westminster.

Many of the delegates come from outside of New Westminster. Once in New Westminster, delegates have the opportunity to experience restaurants, shopping, the Quay, Discovery Centre and other tourist activities and attractions. Anvil Centre and Tourism NW staff provide information on attractions, restaurants, etc.



Delegates also take the opportunity to return to the City to experience the tourism opportunities and bring their friends and families. While return visits are difficult to measure, we have been told that many wedding clients for example become aware of Anvil Centre through a corporate event they have attended.

Delegates impact local businesses significantly during a conference. Delegates spend at restaurants, coffee shops, on parking, shopping and supplies while attending events at Anvil Centre. At the end of the conference day, many delegates will walk to local pubs and restaurants before heading home. Local restaurants are accessed during lunches as not all meals are served at Anvil Centre during events. Local restaurants and bars are provided with event dates and attendance at their request. Restaurants and bars use the information to schedule staff and order product.

Hotel rooms are booked at the Inn at the Quay whenever possible. Room availability is the most significant challenge. Many events requiring room blocks in excess of 50 rooms cannot be accommodated as the hotel runs a very high occupancy with local corporate and leisure travelers. Holiday parties and National events such as the Invasive Species Society and Recovery Capital Conference book 50+ room nights. We have also had events not book as the client was looking for a 'high end' hotel in New

Westminster such as the Hyundai Roadshow from Toronto. A significant number of events have been turned away due to lack of hotel space.

Furthermore, the location and distance of the hotel from Anvil Centre is too far for some people to walk, particularly if they are walking at night, in the rain, after an event or have materials (such as tradeshow items) to carry back and forth.

Conference and Convention Centres are typically built to bring people into a community that normally would not make a trip to the area. As well, economic impact on restaurants and coffee shops, parking, retail, etc. is generated through event delegates.

Washrooms

Questions were raised with respect to the accessibility of washrooms at Anvil Centre.

Washrooms are always accessible during Anvil Centre hours of operations; full access is provided to all people accessing the venue for washroom use.

On days where a corporate meeting, wedding, celebration of life, association AGM, Gala or other contracted event is happening, visitors are directed to washroom facilities on Level 2, 3 and 4.

As a civic facility, we have a responsibility to being a safe and respectful workplace and community space. For this reason, some individuals are no longer permitted in the venue. The circumstances around this can include: if someone has threatened staff and / or guests; has vandalized the venue; or has been physically or verbally violent towards staff and / or guests. These measures are undertaken carefully.

Anvil Centre Pricing

During the startup of Conference Services, a complete business plan and marketing strategy was conducted and implemented. Potential clients (labour, corporate, tech, finance, etc.) and industry associations (Meeting Professionals International, Canadian Association of Exposition Managers) were engaged and asked what was needed in the industry from a venue. Extensive research was completed to ensure that services and marketing was directed to the appropriate client base and markets. The clear message from potential clients and industry associations was that a full service small to mid-size Conference Centre was a missing component in the local market.

A full service Conference Centre provides the following services: equipment and furnishings (tables, chairs, audio visual and staging), conversion labour (set-up of equipment and furnishings), china, glassware and silverware for catering and the costs for these items are covered through Anvil Centre's venue rental rates.

Event venues that are not 'full service' and therefore do not own their own china, glassware, furniture and equipment, and do not have an exclusive catering operator, do

not include these items in their rental rate schedule as they need to outsource. Conference Centre clients book at Anvil Centre as they prefer to have all event details managed by the venue. Most venues will charge rent on furniture, china, glassware & silverware on top of catering rates and room rental rates, which is why there is often a discrepancy in pricing between venues. Anvil Centre includes the majority of these equipment & furniture rental, labour and service costs in the space rental and catering fees.

Corporate clients are expecting fresh, healthy, entrend, quality catering for their events. An extensive RFP process was undertaken to contract the catering operator on a pay for service basis.

Community catering rates with lower cost catering is available through the contracted catering operator for Cultural clients. Community events can be booked through Cultural Services and receive lower rental rate. Rental discounts are in place for local NFP's and other organizations through Cultural Services.

Conference Services Event Booking System

The Conference Services Event Booking System is critical to managing the 300+ activities (events, performances, tours, exhibitions, programs, etc.) that take place in Anvil Centre each year. Ungerboeck is the booking system used by Conference Services, Anvil Theatre and Massey Theatre Society. All venue activities for all departments, including Cultural activities, are entered into the system to ensure smooth management of the building and event logistics, crossover between activities and space bookings – particularly in the common areas of the building. The system manages rental spaces, liquor management, multiple complex tax schemes (food tax, PST, GST, sugar tax, multiple liquor taxes, etc.), labour, attendance, building logistics, client relationship management, deposits and invoicing.

In 2020, the vendor of the booking system informed the City of a significant increase in the cost to use the software which would result in a 300% increase in cost. This cost cannot be justified when lower cost booking systems are available.

A 2023 Capital request was made for a onetime fee for a consultant to assist the City IT Department in moving the Conference client / event data to the cloud as well as provide expertise in the search of a new Event Booking System that can be supported with the current City infrastructure.

To save costs, the current Parks and Recreation management system, PerfectMind, was reviewed as a replacement for the current Event Booking System but it was designed as a scheduling and program registration system, specific to recreation and fitness. Limitations of PerfectMind are that it does not provide the advanced technical platform required to manage Conference Services events such as complex tax schemes, multiple deposits per event on different dates, tracking of services, event orders / resumes, reporting capacities and catering. Staff are not aware of any

Conference venue that uses PerfectMind. The change to a lower cost booking system would create significant annual savings of up to \$70,000.

Animation of Level 1

Conference events take place behind closed walls of the ballroom, creating a perception that the space is not in use. 55,000+ delegates and guests access Level 1 on an annual basis for Conference events.

In 2019, Conference Services worked with a group of BCIT students to develop a marketing plan and community awareness that includes creating a 'warmer' environment on Level 1 to draw people into the venue. The report was completed in December 2019.

Anvil Centre staff immediately started work on this project. Once COVID-19 pandemic hit, all work stopped as we quickly pivoted to create COVID-19 protocols, cancel and re-book events multiple times and work with clients booking essential events (AGM's, Blood Donor Clinics, Vaccination Clinics – flu shots, COVID vaccine, etc.) that were obligated to take place during a worldwide pandemic. All Conference Services FT staff were redeployed to other City Departments with the exception of one for the majority of 2020 and into 2021.

As recovery in the event industry is underway, work on animating Level 1 has restarted.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

Anvil Centre staff have been involved in the preparation of this report.

OPTIONS

There are two options for Council's consideration; they are:

Option 1: THAT Council accept this memo as information regarding the operations of Anvil Centre.

Option 2: That Council provides staff with further direction.

Option 1 is recommended.

APPROVALS

This memo was prepared by:
Vali Marling, General Manager, Anvil Centre

This memo was approved by:
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer